

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Special Exhibition

Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home

—Children and Gishin Yamashita—



Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home when it was initially established

Period March 24, 2023 – September 11, 2023

Place Special Exhibition Room, East Building 1F,
Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Introduction

The atomic bombing deprived many children of their families. In December 1945, the Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home was established in Itsukaichi Town, Saeki County, on the outskirts of the city of Hiroshima, ahead of other facilities that were set up one after another after the war to raise the orphaned children. Gishin Yamashita (1894-1989), the first director of the foster home, invested his own funds to establish the facility; he was engaged in the operation of the foster home and raising orphans.

Later, as a member of the Diet from Hiroshima Prefecture, Gishin Yamashita energetically introduced legislation mainly focusing on improving social welfare. Above all, he made an outstanding contribution to provide compensation for mobilized students who became victims of the war as well as to draft the A-bomb Survivors Medical Care Law.

This exhibition describes the history of the Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home and the life of Gishin Yamashita, primarily exhibiting materials that were donated by the Yamashita family in 2018.

1. Evacuation of Schoolchildren and the Atomic Bombing

As the full-scale air raids by the U.S. Military on the Japanese mainland intensified, schoolchildren in the city of Hiroshima became the subject of group evacuations. Starting in April 1945, evacuations of schoolchildren to rural areas within the prefecture began. On August 6, 1945, while many children were living in groups at different evacuation sites, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.



Children leaving for their evacuation site

April 1945 Courtesy of Hakushima Elementary School

Children left for their evacuation sites by train or other means while being seen off by their family members reluctant to part. They carried rucksacks and bags, which contained lunch boxes if necessary; their families made boxed lunches for them with love, thinking that it might be the last chance to do so. This photo shows children from Hakushima Elementary School as they head to their evacuation site.

Children gathering at a temple at their evacuation site

April 1945 Suzuhari Village, Asa County Chokakuji Temple
Courtesy of Hakushima Elementary School

Upon arrival at the evacuation site, the supervising teachers and children were greeted by the local people. Sometimes children were served rice balls covered with sweet red bean paste called "ohagi," and they happily ate something they rarely had a chance to eat due to the food shortage. They lodged at local temples and community centers, and attended the local elementary school.

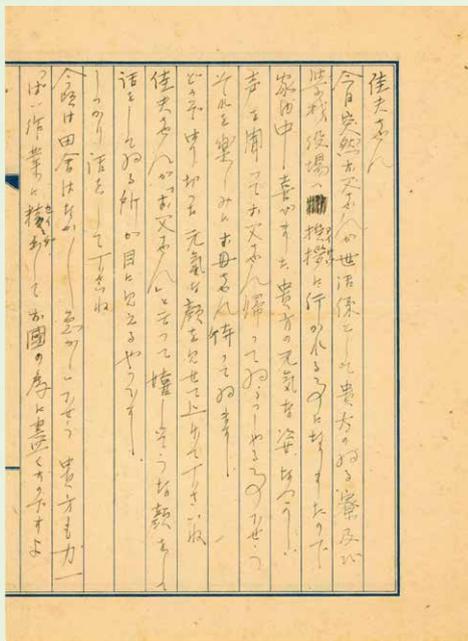
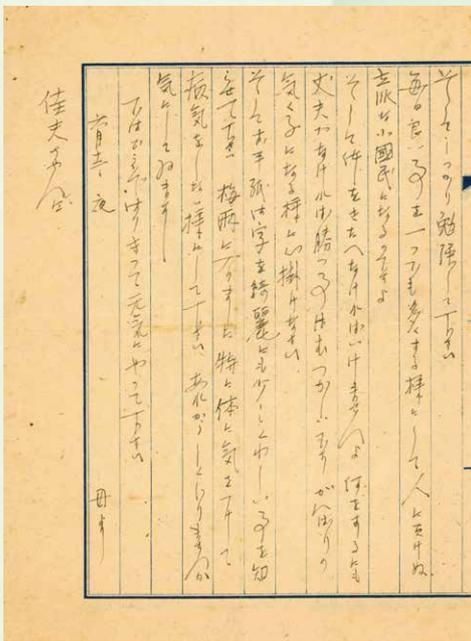


Clearing bamboo

April to September 1945 Mirasaka Town, Futami County
Courtesy of Yozo Umeno

To supplement the food shortages, children would use hoes and cultivate land for planting. This photo shows children from Nakajima Elementary School at work. To support the war effort, increasing food production in rural areas was encouraged. Therefore, evacuated children helped plant rice, harvest wheat, clear weeds from rice paddies, and so on.





A letter from a mother to a child evacuee

June 12, 1945 Donated by Yoshio Onishi

(Excerpt)

“Dear Yoshio,
 Today, it was suddenly decided that Father, as a caretaker, would visit your residence and school, and go to the village office to extend greetings. The whole family is excited about that. I'm sure he will be happy to see you in good health and hear your voice again. I can't wait to hear from Father about his visit with you...”

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Daily logs written after the atomic bombing

August 6 and 7, 1945
 Donated by Genso Ota

These are the daily logs of August 6 and 7, written by a supervising teacher from Misasa Elementary School. The entry of the 7th says that everyone was so depressed with worry about the air raid on Hiroshima that they could hardly sleep.

*Some part of the images are processed.

Children crying at the sight of the burning sky of Hiroshima

August 6, 1945 Obayashi Village, Asa County Obayashi Temple
 Drawn by Yoshiko Yoneo (10 years old at the time of the bombing, 39 years old at the time of drawing)
 Yoshiko Yoneo, who drew this picture, was a student at Hakushima Elementary School. She had been evacuated in a group to Obayashi Village, Asa County.

Sea of ruins

August 11 to 17, 1945
 400 m from the hypocenter Takajo-machi
 Photo by and courtesy of Kanzo Ohashi
 This photo was taken toward the west from Takajo-machi. The area covered the school districts of Honkawa Elementary School and Hirose Elementary School.



2. Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home and Its Founder, Gishin Yamashita

Two days after the atomic bombing, a lost children's center was set up in Hijiyama Elementary School in the city of Hiroshima for children who had lost their families due to the atomic bombing and had no relatives to depend on. Discharged from the Goto Islands of Nagasaki where he had served in September 1945, Gishin Yamashita visited the lost children's center and witnessed the pitiful condition of children who were losing their lives due to the damage caused by the atomic bombing and serious shortage of food.

In December 1945, Yamashita established the Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home at his own expense. In addition to the children from the lost children's center, he also took in children who lost their parents in the atomic bombing and remained at their evacuation sites, and raised them at the foster home.

Gishin Yamashita, the founder



Gishin Yamashita
Courtesy of the Yamashita Family

Gishin Yamashita was born as the oldest son of a wealthy family running a kimono fabric shop in Kure City. Yamashita took over the family business; however, his family business got into financial trouble due to the Great Depression starting in 1929. At one time, it became difficult for him to even provide for his family. Strongly urged by his mother, a devout believer in Buddhism, Yamashita started to study Buddhism, and after turning 40, he took a new road in life as a Buddhist priest.

During the war, Yamashita enlisted in the military. He was informed of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Fukue Island, one of the Goto Islands of Nagasaki, where he served till the end of the war. Reflecting on his past conduct, Yamashita decided to devote himself to provide relief to every victim of war, then returned to Hiroshima in the middle of September.



"Pledge to save war victims" August 27, 1945

Yamashita's determination to provide relief to every victim of war is stated.

Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home

Learning about the miserable condition of the lost children's center on Hijiyama Hill, Yamashita directly contacted the governor of Hiroshima with request to use a prefectural building in Itsukaichi for relieving orphans. As a result, Yamashita received an answer saying that he was allowed to rent the prefectural land and building although no financial support would be provided. Yamashita embarked on the relief of orphans by himself.

The name "Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home" was given by Yamashita who wished to raise the orphaned children as if they had been raised by their own parents at home. Supported by his family's understanding and collaborators, Yamashita developed the facilities, using his own fund.

Starting on December 23, 1945, roughly 30 children from the lost children's center on Hijiyama Hill, roughly 20 children from the evacuation sites, and other children who had nowhere to go were taken in to the foster home. In March 1946, the following year, roughly 60 children between 3 and 16 years of age were taken in to the facility.



Mealtime

When the foster home was initially established, it didn't have a large room; the children were divided into two groups to have meals separately. Beginning from May 1946, "family dinner day" was provided several times per month, giving them opportunities to have meals at a round table. In the fall of the same year, the new dining room was built. They made various efforts so that they could have meals in a more family-like atmosphere; they put tablecloths and changed aluminum dinnerware to ceramic.



Nameplate on the foster home's gatepost



Education

When the foster home was initially established, a separate classroom of Nobori-cho Elementary School was opened in the facility. Teachers sent from the school mainly educated the children. This educational measure was continuously taken until March 1948, and then children started to commute to neighboring schools.

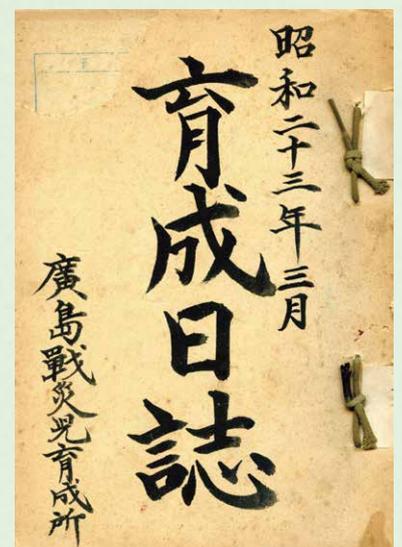
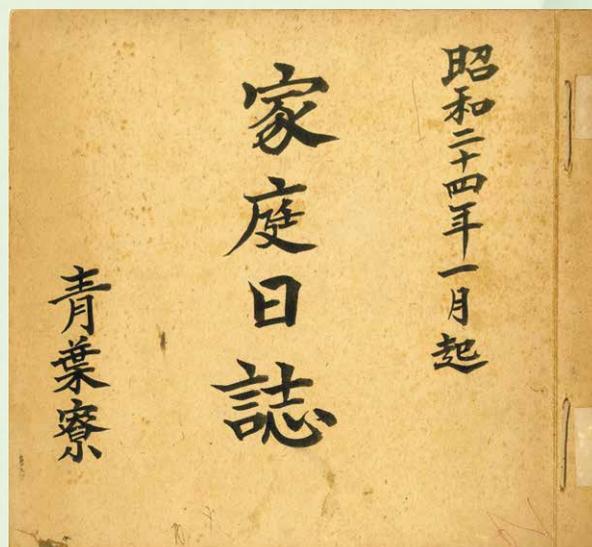
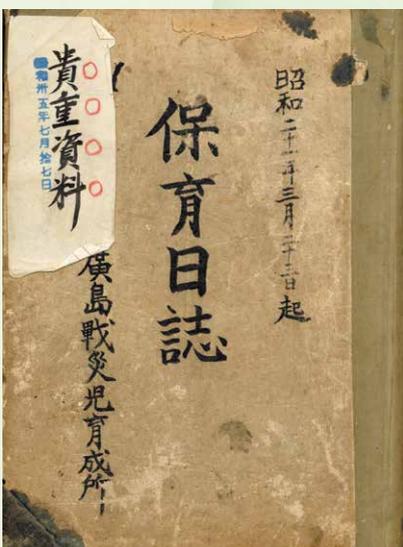


Doshinji Temple

For children who were longing for their parents, Yamashita renovated a building in the premises of the foster home in a Buddhist style and named it "Hikari-ga-oka Doshinji (Child's Mind Temple on the Hill of Light)." In the temple's main hall, morning services were held every day. In addition, Buddhist alters were set up in every resident, and a memorial service was held on the 6th of every month.

Visit of the emperor

In December 7, 1947, during the Emperor Showa's visit to Hiroshima, Gishin Yamashita had an opportunity to meet the emperor, who got off the car near the foster home on his way from Miyajima Island to the center of the city of Hiroshima. Although the time was quite limited, Director Yamashita introduced boy monks to the emperor and gave a brief introduction about the foster home, showing a boy's scar on his head.

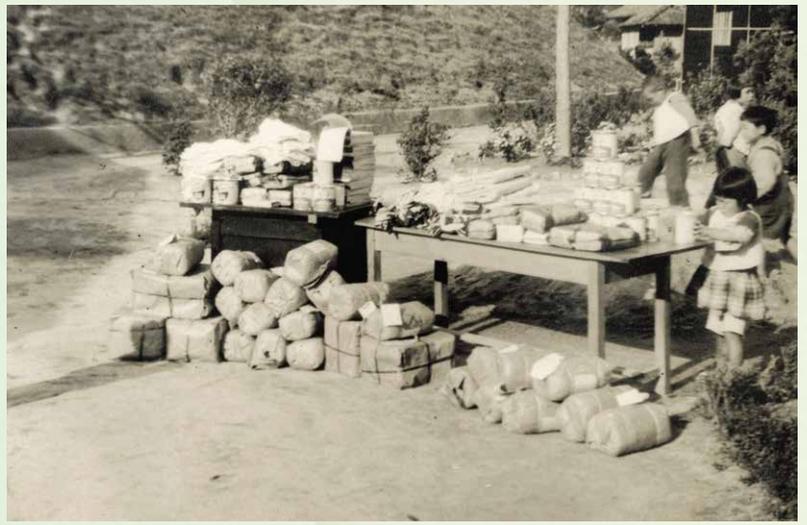


Daily logs of the foster home

The foster home maintained sectoral business logs such as cooking, sanitation, clothing, education, and general affairs, as well as a nursing log, which was later renamed as "family log" in 1948.

LARA aid supplied to the foster home

In addition to support from the government, the foster home also received donations and relief supplies from a number of people both at home and abroad. Various groups, including youth organizations and women’s associations, and individuals also offered labor services. In particular, the Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia (LARA), mainly consisting of religious organizations in the U.S., continuously sent relief supplies, so called LARA aid supplies, to the foster home until 1952, and bolstered the livelihood of the children living in the foster home.



Moral adoption

Following the proposal by Norman Cousins, an American critic who visited Hiroshima in August 1949, and others, a support program for atomic-bomb orphans was initiated. The moral adoption, a system in which people living in the U.S. would become “moral parents” of the orphans in Hiroshima and provide them with moral support and financial aid, was firstly introduced to the children living in the foster home. This program was later expanded to include other foster care institutions and was continued until the children became grown-ups.



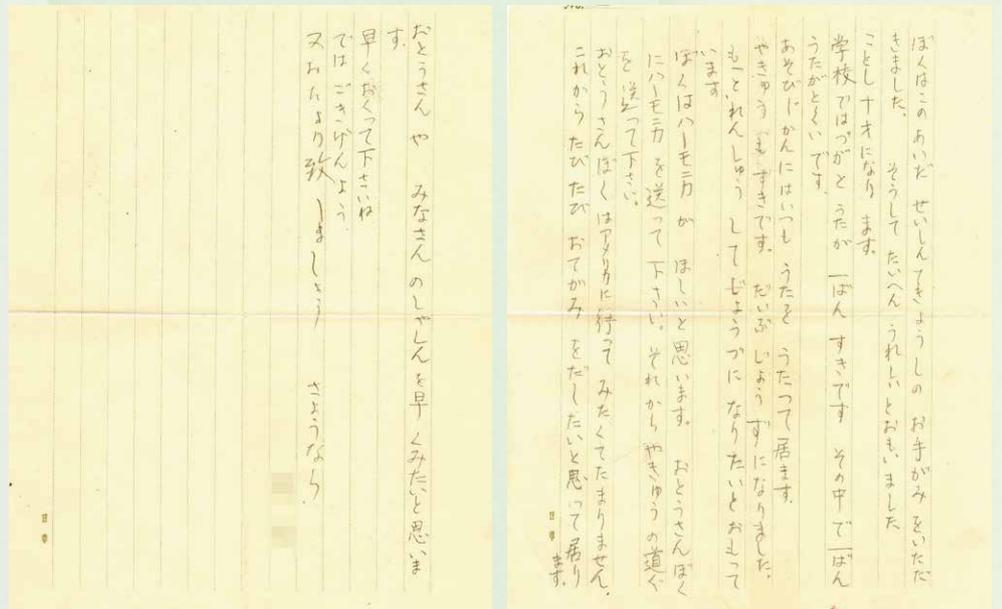
Books from a moral parent in the U.S.
Donated by Masaaki Ueda



Relief supplies from the U.S.
Donated by Ninoshima Gakuen



Letter from a foster home child to their moral parent
Donated by James Key and Brinkley Burks Pound
*Some part of the images are processed.



3. Gishin Yamashita's Activity as a Politician

While managing the foster home as its director, in April 1947, Gishin Yamashita ran for the first postwar House of Councillors in order to achieve his postwar resolution to provide relief to all war victims and was elected.

He served two terms (12 years) in the National Diet as a member of the Committee on Health and Welfare, one of the Diet's standing committees, and then as its chairperson, and engaged in the establishment of various legal systems concerning social welfare in postwar Japan.

In particular, he prepared the first draft for the subsequent A-bomb Survivors Medical Care Law, and played a significant role as a bridge between the central and local governments as a member of the Diet from Hiroshima Prefecture.



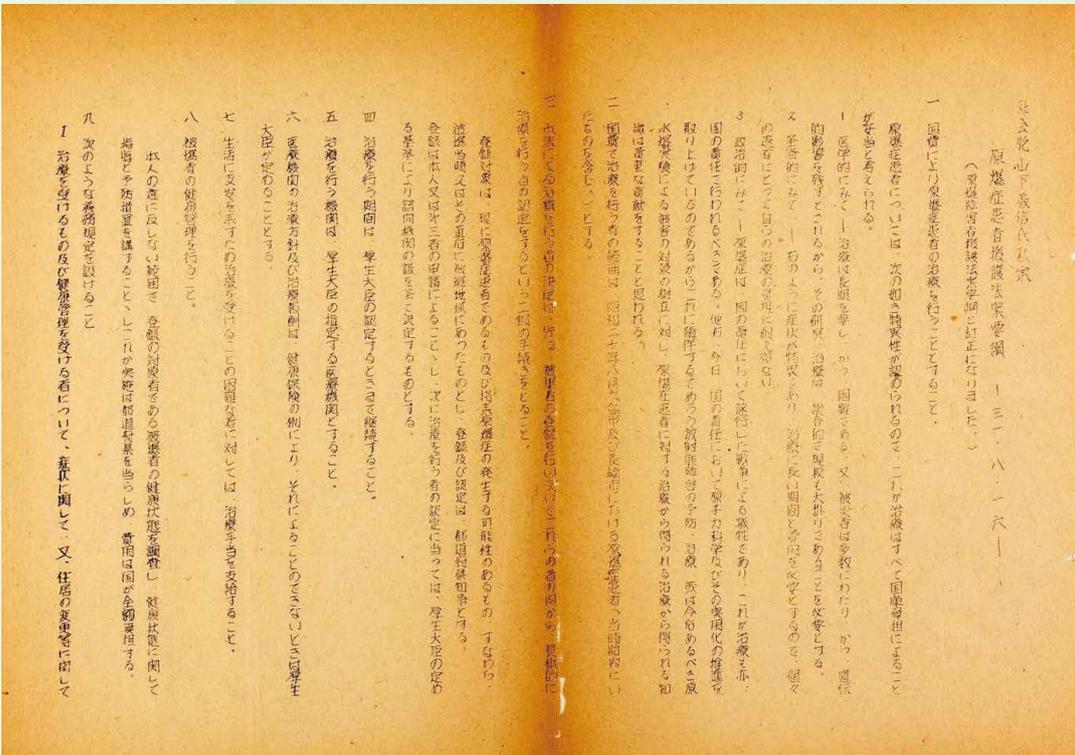
Gishin Yamashita listening to requests at a meeting of a widows organization in Kure with bureaucrats

Summer 1950 Courtesy of the Yamashita family



Gishin Yamashita making representations at the Ministry of Health and Welfare

January 1959 Courtesy of the Chugoku Shimbun



(Excerpt)

“The medical treatment of atomic-bomb disease patients shall be provided at the expense of the government.

Since the following specificities are recognized in patients with the atomic-bomb disease, it is reasonable to assume that all medical treatment for these patients be paid for by the government.”

“From a political viewpoint, the atomic-bomb disease is a consequence of war, which was carried out by the government, so it should take over the responsibility for the treatment.”

Proposal of Gishin Yamashita, the Social Democratic Party of Japan: the outline of a bill on Relief of Atomic-bomb Disease Patients

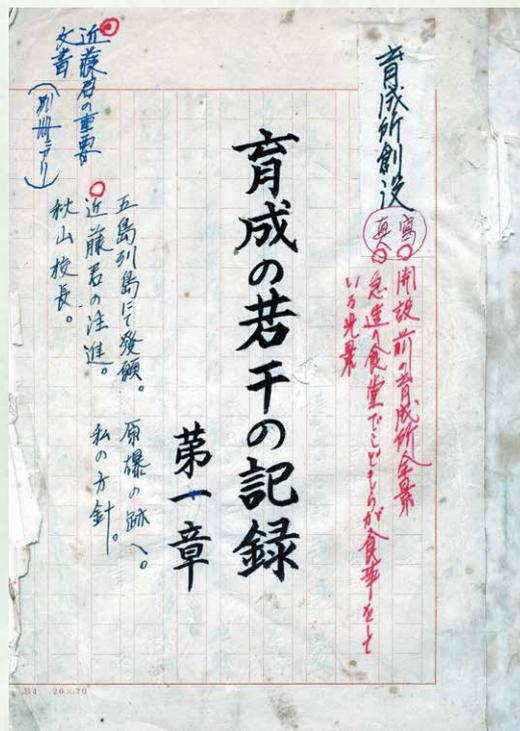
August 16, 1956 Documents relating to the Hiroshima Prefecture Federation of A-bomb Victims Associations Collection of the Hiroshima University Archives

Prior to the enactment of the “A-bomb Survivors Medical Care Law (1957),” Yamashita presented the outline of a bill as a proposal of the Socialist Party in August 1956, calling for the government to take responsibility for the treatment of the atomic-bomb disease because it was a consequent of the war caused by the government and their peculiar symptoms would continue for a long time.

Conclusion

The Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home founded by Gishin Yamashita accepted a total of roughly 170 children until 1953, when the operation of the foster home was transferred to the City of Hiroshima. Although many of the children who had lived at the foster home did not tell the fact that they had lived there even to their family members, they would at times hold gatherings to look back upon that time.

Gishin Yamashita stepped down from the management of the facility, and in 1959, he also retired from politics. However, he remained concerned about the future lives of the foster home's children. His encouragement and support were continuously given to them for the rest of his life. Later in his life, Gishin Yamashita had carefully preserved the records and materials on the former foster home, and compiled *Ikusei no Jakkan no Kiroku* (*Piece of Education Record*), which describes the history of the foster home from its establishment. It is regarded as a valuable record vividly depicting how children, who lost their parents in the atomic bombing, and adults, who took care of them, survived during the period of confusion after the war.



Ikusei no Jakkan no Kiroku, Chapter 1

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Special Exhibition

Hiroshima War Orphans Foster Home: Children and Gishin Yamashita

Period March 24, 2023 – September 11, 2023

Place Special Exhibition Room, East Building 1F, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Curatorial Division, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

1-2, Nakajima-cho, Naka-ku, Hiroshima, JAPAN 730-0811

TEL +81-82-241-4004 FAX +81-82-542-7941 <https://hpmmuseum.jp/>

